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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 001420

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [KCRM](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: GOA TELLS ISAF THAT ITS IO CAMPAIGN UNDERMINES
COUNTER-NARCOTICS ACTIVITIES

REF: A. KABUL 1231
[1](#)B. KABUL 1059

Classified By: DCM Richard B. Norland for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C/NF) SUMMARY: The Ministry of Interior on April 24 convoked public information officials from ISAF and the UK Embassy to register disapproval over a series of IO products regarding poppy eradication that UK Task Force Helmand had disseminated during its Spring campaign. The IO products attempt to distance ISAF from eradication but also implicitly condone poppy cultivation. News of the IO products led President Karzai to express concern to COMISAF on April 24. Local and international media have been reporting on the dissonance between the GOA's counter-narcotics policies and ISAF's information operations. The UK Embassy representative said that his government was "deeply embarrassed" by the incident and promised a moratorium on all IO products addressing narcotics. While alluding to coordination issues in developing the IO products, ISAF nonetheless stressed the need to maintain a distinction between counter-insurgency operations and counter-narcotics. The GOA has rebuked ISAF in the media for its counter-productive IO activities. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (U) Since April 22, local and international media have been reporting on ISAF-sponsored radio spots and leaflet drops that accompanied Operation Achilles. These IO products were in public circulation in March and April. An April 22 article from "Arman-e-Milli Daily" reported the text of one leaflet as reading, "Dear respectful and noble residents of Helmand province, ANA and ISAF are military forces and work for Afghan government. ANA and ISAF will not destroy your poppy fields. Poppies serve as the only tool of economy and benefits for the farmers and we don't want to stop your source of feeding and income." The UK Embassy informed us that one radio spot that ran in Helmand told listeners that ISAF and the ANA know that many Afghans have no choice but to grow poppy and ISAF and the ANA do not want to affect their livelihoods.

[1](#)3. (C/NF) President Karzai informed COMISAF at a security briefing on April 24 that these messages undermine the GOA's counter-narcotics operations and need to stop. Later that

day the Ministry of Interior registered its objection to the messages to both ISAF and UK Embassy. Deputy Interior Minister Mohammed Daud told ISAF and UK Embassy representatives that NATO was in Afghanistan to support the GOA, and NATO has an obligation to make clear to the Afghan people that cultivating poppy is against the law. Daud further noted that Helmand Governor Wafa was "screaming" at President Karzai and the Ministry of Interior that he cannot fulfill Karzai's order for more eradication in Helmand in an environment where ISAF is publicly condoning poppy cultivation (ref A).

14. (C/NF) A public affairs officer from the British Embassy Drugs Team reviewed the problematic messages with Daud and Deputy Minister of Counter Narcotics General Khodaidad and said that the UK Government was "deeply embarrassed" by the messages and had ordered an immediate moratorium on all Task Force Helmand IO products referring to poppy cultivation or eradication. ISAF's civilian spokesperson explained the rationale behind the messages, telling the two Deputy Ministers that ISAF had been attempting to minimize casualties and make clear that Operation Achilles was aimed solely against Taliban insurgents, not local residents who may have been concerned about protecting their poppy crops.

15. (U) At an ISAF press conference on April 25, Afghan radio journalists continued to inquire about the messages:

-- Radio Azadi - "It appears that the fight for peace and the fight against drugs are not coordinated. What is ISAF's reaction to the assertion that it is giving conflicting messages about countering drugs in Afghanistan?"

KABUL 00001420 002 OF 002

-- Pajhwok Radio - "If the messages in Helmand were ambiguous what was ISAF trying to say with the radio broadcasts and leaflets?"

ISAF's line on this issue is to express its support for the GOA's counter-narcotics strategy while making clear that it is not involved in eradication activities. It justifies the messages as intended to minimize civilian casualties and says that their ambiguity led to misinterpretation. ISAF and the UK Embassy tell us that they have been inundated by press queries. We have received only one request for comment, and our line is: "The U.S. Government supports Afghanistan's National Drug Control Strategy. Eradication is an important law enforcement function within that strategy, which also includes alternative livelihoods, interdiction, and public awareness, among other tactics." For further information we are referring callers to ISAF.

16. COMMENT: These events may affect the eradication effort that the GOA and we are launching in Uruzgan using the Afghan Eradication Force starting April 26. END COMMENT
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